



State of Connecticut

SENATOR LEONARD A. FASANO

SENATE MINORITY LEADER

34TH DISTRICT

SUITE 3400

LEGISLATIVE OFFICE BUILDING

HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT 06106-1591

www.SenatorFasano.com

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HARTFORD: (860) 240-8800

TOLL FREE: (800) 842-1421

FAX: (860) 240-8306

Len.Fasano@oga.ct.gov

Senator Catherine Osten
Co-Chair Planning and Development Committee
Legislative Office Building, Room 2100
Hartford, CT 06106-1591

Representative Philip Miller
Co-Chair Planning and Development Committee
Legislative Office Building, Room 2102
Hartford, CT 06106-1591

Dear Senator Osten and Representative Miller:

Due to the limitations on the introduction of proposed bills by individual legislators in short session years, I am writing to request that your committee raise a bill entitled *An Act Concerning Community Empowerment* that includes the following proposals:

1. Establish A Community Empowerment Program

To ensure that state municipal aid is used to directly benefit the lives of city residents, enhanced PILOT reimbursement and state sales tax revenue sharing funds shall be expended as follows:

- 35% will be spent on priorities of the Community Investment Boards (CIBs) as approved by a vote of the municipality;
- 35% will be spent on priorities of the municipality; and
- The remaining 30% will be made available for expenditure if the CIBs and municipal officials can agree on the expenditure;
- If the municipality and the CIBs cannot agree, the 30% will remain with the state.

Community Investment Boards would be comprised of all stakeholders in a community including residents, businesses, local religious leaders, community development corporations and other community groups. For municipalities with large populations, there will be one board for every neighborhood since the strengths and a weakness of each neighborhood varies and a city-wide program will not allow for the neighborhood-centric model that we are looking to create.

Every year over a billion dollars in state aid flows through the city halls of our major cities. Yet, the everyday lives of city residents fail to improve. Indeed, poverty rates continue to climb and dependence on public assistance increases. In Hartford, which has received \$2 billion in state aid over the last five years, there has been a significant increase in unemployment and a disturbing spike in the homicide rate.

Insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result. Clearly, sending billions of dollars to city hall is not working. We need to think innovatively and empower residents to decide what they need as a community to prosper.

2. Promote the Neighborhood Revitalization Zone Program

The Neighborhood Revitalization Zone (NRZ) program encourages individuals and businesses in distressed neighborhoods to work collaboratively to prepare and implement a strategic plan to revitalize their neighborhood.

Pursuant to the Connecticut General Statutes, once a municipality establishes a zone and a neighborhood committee is established and submits complete plans to the Office of Policy and Management, the state will assist in the revitalization of the neighborhood by providing comments on the proposed plans, coordinate state agencies to support the plans of the NRZs, and expedite the review of requests for modifications to codes and regulations that are identified as impediments to achieving the NRZs goals and objectives.

3. Create An "Urban Challenge"

Create an "Urban Challenge" website which will invite people and organizations to submit proposals for dealing with specific urban area problems. If a viable suggestion is given for a particular problem, a pilot implementation of said suggestion can be implemented in a selected neighborhood. A state entity would monitor the policy's implementation and assess the results. In addition, the state would provide a small monetary award for "solving" a particular problem similar to Eli Lilly's InnoCentive initiative.

State policymakers do not have all of the answers. This program will promote creative thinking towards solving problems that are facing urban communities.

4. Identify and Support Effective Community Non-Profit Providers

The state's non-profit provider system is absolutely critical for the state to provide services for Connecticut citizens in a cost-effective manner. There are hundreds if not thousands of these providers that receive state funding for various purposes through the fiscal year.

Currently, there is no mechanism to ensure that the large sums of state money given to providers is spent in an efficient and cost-effective manner. As a result those providers that excel at their job are supported the same as those that may not be as effective. The state needs a healthy and robust non-profit provider network if it is to succeed with all the initiatives currently in place and those that may come into place in the future.

This initiative would create a bipartisan commission to review the various requirements that may currently be required by state agencies. This commission would further be charged with developing recommendations on a standard set of outcomes that would be required of all non-profit providers that receive state funding.

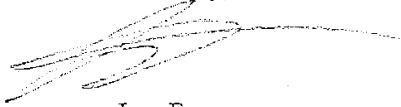
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This proposal would ensure that monies are going only to those providers that are doing their job well rather than supporting entities and/or efforts that are shown to not be successful. It would provide objective criteria for providers to understand what is expected of them and how their performance will be assessed, and public transparency and accountability for privately operated programs supported with tax payer dollars.

In addition, non-profit providers currently need to make different reports for different funding sources. This proposal would also assist the non-profits by streamlining reporting requirements across all state agencies.

Thank you for your time and attention, and I look forward to working with you on these important initiatives.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Len Fasano', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Len Fasano
Senate Minority Leader

cc: Senator Art Linares
Representative William Aman